

# PRIDE OF FRANCE IN HER WONDERFUL ARTILLERY

By WILLIAM T. MARTIN.

Supreme Confidence Reigns in the Serried Trenches Where the Long .75s Roar Their Machinelike Defiance at the Teuton Invaders—Ingenious Devices Used to Screen Guns From Prying Eyes of Enemy Aviators

HALF a mile on the other side of the scattering of woods at the top of the hill is the first line. With the woods ends a region where, after the fighting of the week, the air is filled with a strained, weighted element, things seem to shimmer and the soldiers move about stealthily and speak in whispers.

Here is suddenly a gentle land of hills and valleys. Down over the slope across the broad valley to the hill on the other side, a mile away, is nothing indicative of war save for the few soldiers plodding here and there and the gaping holes of various sizes that dot the escape as far as the eyes can follow.

In the present lull of the fighting the soldiers are unbroken, except occasionally by a dull crack, a report or a muted explosion back there, over the land away from the woods as an air of undisturbed peace.

Connected from the keen eyes of the German aviators among the many clusters of trees that spring up here and there and extend over the crest of the hill under the gun barrels, the Captain of artillery says, to blow the enemy's trenches out of existence in a few minutes if it is necessary.

He has chosen a battery of big guns half way up the slope on the other side. They are long range guns, two of the latest in the sector, and he is on his way to them. Within an hour he has orders to fire on a town far over on the other side. "We must hurry," he says. "There is little time."

He guns have been silent now for over a week. From the road that runs by almost under their noses the two great barrels, spotted the color of foliage, covered with evergreens and hidden among the cluster of trees, are invisible. The soldiers passing by day and night on their way to and from the trenches have almost forgotten the battery.

The deep resonance of the pieces as they figured in the recent attacks or shot thunder in the dead of night with a message of death to some town back of the German trenches fixed the battery in the minds of the soldiers as distinct from the other guns of the neighborhood. Batteries are changed frequently, almost daily sometimes, and now, except for the few artillerymen connected with the pieces and allowed to enter the clump of trees, the majority of the soldiers have ceased to give them thought.

From among the trees at the outer edge of the cluster two soldiers step out and fix their bayonets as the Captain enters. He is recognized, they salute, and he passes. He comes upon an opening in the trees and gives orders to soldiers standing around. Instantly there is activity.

In the subdued light of the afternoon and in the shadows of the trees it is some time before the eyes become accustomed to the men and things that move about in all directions.

Soldiers spring up from nowhere apparently as they suddenly stand out in the distance. They wear long coats daubed in spots like clusters of leaves and caps of the same material. They are easy enough to see near by, but at a distance unless a sharp lookout is kept on their movements they fade away and are lost.

There must be at least a score of men hastening here and there in the small opening. They move with regularity and system. Some open large boxes and take out little white bags filled with something, while others in groups laboriously strain against the long heavy things that are called shells.

Suddenly one notices that the side of the hill opposite toward the road ends in two great pits. In them are the guns. Set in the ground some feet below the surface so that only their muzzles point out in the direction of the woods on the hill over the valley. It is difficult to distinguish the long barrels among clusters of green ferns and other plants. But the massive cylindrical wheels tower above the heads of the men working there and are distinctly seen against the foliage of the pits. As they uncover the foliage from the guns there is less activity and finally silence.

"We are almost ready to fire," the Captain says as he hurries away. "Stand on your toes and if necessary after the first shot hold your ears."

He runs over and stands above on the ground between the pits. Six men labor in the one to the right. One at the left is squinting on his knees through a glass hanging from a frame along the piece, while at the massive wheels stands another adjusting an instrument attached to a place under the high barrel at the word of the first man. They are the range men.

Other soldiers have placed the shell on a carrier at the back of the gun and two others are in the breach. In back of it they place one of the white bags. The breach looks. The bag contains the explosive for the propulsive force.

Finished, the men crouch at the back of the pit slightly to one side. On the right a soldier with a stick in his hand reaches to a case of the shells. The barrel of the gun stands another soldier.

"N-u-m-b-e-r one, r-e-a-d-y," the Captain calls out—"fire!"

The soldier with the stick pulls it. He crouches with his face to one side. There is a deafening crack. The barrel pushes into the face, sends one stumbling backward and shoots a mighty pulse through the trees.



A French .155 long range gun firing on a French town in German territory ten miles away. Taken at instant of explosion.

The pride of France is in her artillery. The famous .75s and the other guns have done as much as the men behind them to hold back the tide of German invasion. In the accompanying article is a vivid picture of the duel that is going on incessantly between the French and the German artillery. There is also an interesting account of the means used to conceal both men and guns from the enemy.

The Captain shouts. A second mighty roar, the earth shakes again and the gun in the other pit rears up as though from the ground, rolls back and rumbles forward again.

The ears ring with a consuming noise, dried twigs and parts of foliage flutter down as one stands there dully trying to collect the senses. It is but for an instant.

Meanwhile the battle is renewed. Another shell slides into the first pit, is swung into the breach, from which comes a thick column of smoke, the rock swings back and closes. A soldier, face and arms blackened and greasy, rams a long rod into the barrel from the mouth and the two on the left busy at the instruments give occasional slight turns to a wheel while the squinting goes on. With incredible speed born of long practice the work is finished and the men stand by. The same thing begins to go on in the other pit.

The order is repeated and again bursts the terrific volume of sound. As it pulses out it seems hardly possible that steel, even the truest, can withstand such a strain. It seems that the gun is breaking into splinters. A soldier behind the gun, with a cartwheel, looks on with a look of intense interest.

The great guns are fired again and again. They explode about half a minute apart while the Captain stands there. Everybody works at capacity and with perfect system. Standing close to the gun, the Captain explains with pride one of the few on the front in France, over the door is a sign and it reads, "Café de Chance."

There is a stock of tobacco, regular and special wines and enough canned goods and boxed eatables to fill out several shelves of a grocery store. A soldier comes out and takes the order. It is present here in the arbor. At an opening in the foliage one can see through the woods across the valley to the hill where the trenches are.

On the other side up the slope of the hill the Captain points some distance out over the ground. There, side by side, are five shell holes, each one several feet across. They line up so regular.

The pieces are fired a dozen times or so each, then are silent. The Captain comes over with perspiration running over his face and a smile. "It is over," he says. They have just fired at a town about ten miles on the other side. So the crashes of the shells as they exploded were not heard.

"They'll learn by dropping shells into our town," he continues. "They killed forty-seven down there yesterday. Women and children too. Pigs of barbarians!"

He gives a vehement shake to his fist in the direction of the German lines as he puts his orders into his pocket. Written in the orders are the number of shells, the exact time and the order of firing. In a minute it is hard to follow them out.

Meanwhile the men have wiped clean the breeches, rammed the long barrels and packed away the delicate looking little instruments used at the side for the range finding. Now they take the trucks and branches of evergreens and lay them over the pieces. In a minute it is hard to see the guns at all.

We make our way back through the trees over a much travelled path. It runs around numerous shell holes. It suddenly pulls up amid a group of orange looking mouldlike things and the trees. They are several feet above the ground and are made of deep layers of earth, heavy logs and rocks. At the sides are doors and sometimes steps cut into the ground lead down to them. Here are the quarters of the men. Some distance on the side of these dwellings. It is a battery village.

The artillerymen lounge about tussle around in the open good naturedly like so many children and some sit at little round tables under rustic shelters. They write and make little souvenirs. Some are carving out canes, others with pins or needles pick away at leaves around patterns. Finished, they have inscriptions on them seen through the filmy, almost invisible but intact remnant of the leaf fibers. Others of the men stand before mirrors hung on trees, shaving before going back to town on short leaves.

"Shells land here occasionally," explains the Captain, "but they are chance shots. The Germans do not know our range. So long as this is the case we will stay here. We are well concealed. Their aimers try hard to find us, but their pictures show nothing."

On the other side of the village the path forks around the great trunk of a tree fallen over. It has been splintered by a shell and hangs by a shred or so to an upright section several feet high. The tangled shreds of wood are still fresh.

strong we are here," the Captain roars. "Few of our own soldiers do let them come down and we will keep them out of existence, the Boches, for they cannot drive us back. Here lies the strength of our trenches over on the hill. The pride of France is in her artillery."

A path leads to a mound somewhat larger than the others and higher above the ground. It is covered with evergreens. They seem fresh and green, as though just cut. The path leads under an arbor along the side thick with foliage, but there is nothing growing.

From the other side the place looks like a log cabin. Near a door in the middle is a table and at it a bench and a chair. They are made from the branches of trees. This is a cafe, the Captain explains with pride one of the few on the front in France, over the door is a sign and it reads, "Café de Chance."

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Here and there are other batteries among the trees. They are discernible only when one is almost upon them. The woods seem to be full of guns. They are of all sizes. To the right are four of the giant .220 mortars and along the side of the guns ready to be shot off at an instant's notice are piles of massive shells. These are the largest guns in general use by the army.



French .220 mortar, the largest gun in general use in the army.

evenly that they almost make a straight line.

"There is a remarkable thing," the Captain says with a shrug. "Their range is less remarkable, but some of their guns are good, or their shells, no doubt. It is a freak, but our .75s could not have done better. The guns that fired these shells are five miles away."

As he speaks the air is split with two sharp, piercing reports that tear down along the hill. They sound like shells bursting near by, so near in fact that the head involuntarily lowers. Two more sharp detonations follow immediately. The Captain laughs.

"Just our .75s over there," he says, pointing up over the hill. "They've moved them down a little. Found their old range. Now they're back there—half a mile!"

The crashes of the guns still throb in the ears. The noise of the .75 guns is sharper, more piercing, than that of any other gun in the French army. Heard through the stillness that follows are the crash of the shells as they explode over in the trenches. Again there is something distinctive about the noise in its sharpness—a tearing, ripping character. As they fly high in the air the shells make a noise like the ripping of heavy silk.

The Captain explains the guns are shooting at the German trenches, getting a fresh range possibly. We make our way toward the battery over ground that suddenly breaks into vast numbers of shell holes, becomes a continuation of them and gives the land a level appearance. It is possible to walk from one hole to another for a long distance in any direction.

The land becomes barren and dead. Here and there are former sites of batteries, dozens of them. The general appearance is devastated and grewsome. Trees suddenly appear life-

which it comes in contact. The heat generated is so intense that fragments of grenades packed up some moments after an explosion were found to be nearly red hot.

"This explosive is not a propellant, but exclusively a disruptive. Its explosion at night is distinguishable for a long distance, due to the light caused by the release of the white hot matter, and in daylight by a cloud of black smoke given off."

One advantage of this explosive is that it does away with the necessity of firing a shell with small bullets. The powder fills the shell and when it explodes it forms into pieces that look like iron ore. Some are as small as a finger tip and others are several inches in diameter. It is easy to manufacture and is not dangerous to handle.

QUEER FISH AT PALM BEACH.

THE oddest looking fish ever seen in Palm Beach, and probably the only one of its kind ever caught in American waters, was harpooned in the Gulf Stream the other day by Ambrose Monnell, Jr., president of the Midvale Steel Company.

It was an elephant eared snailfish, estimated to have been spawned anywhere from 200 to 400 years ago and to have weighed then about one sixty thousandth part of its weight when captured, which was close to a ton.

Exploded during the reaction cause a very violent explosion.

"About 50 per cent. of the explosive is converted into matter. On the burst-

ing of the shell, bomb or grenade out what they are, namely, rings from the trenches made by French soldiers from the fuses of German shells.

Mrs. Daniel Gregory Mason, an American woman, was the first to have specimens of these rings gathered into a collection and brought to this country, where they were sold for the benefit of the French soldiers.

The collection was made by workers among the soldiers attached to the various relief commissions in France. Mme. Charles Le Verrier became its custodian and was the one who brought it to America.

French artillerymen up from below ground during a lull in the firing. Entrance to their trench in background.

Above—Effect of an incendiary shell from a French battery fired into a town back of the German trenches.

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